



## "For the Children": Class, Race, Place, and Late Capitalist Eco-Enclosure in Benton Harbor

by *Paul Street*

September 23, 2007

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*"One of the great gifts we can give our children is to make sure they connect with the amazing natural resources we have in Michigan. Whether we take them fishing, hunting, hiking, mountain-biking or simply let them discover the beauty of nature, helping our children connect with the outdoors is essential to making sure our natural resources are protected and respected in the future."*

- Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, March 2007 (Niles Daily Star, 2007)

*"Here is another case of the rich taking from the poor, while those we have elected to protect our best interests, including our governor, tout what a great thing it will be for the community....The rich will get richer, while the working class and poor lose a little more of what they already have little access to: the lake. Soon, if developers have their way, there will be no such thing as public parks or scenic lake views in Michigan for the masses to enjoy."*

- Michigan resident Mary Smith, August 10, 2007 (Smith 2007)

*"We're using economic development to change people's lives."*

- David Whitwam, former CEO of Whirlpool, July 2007

### DISASTER AS BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Beneath the violence and related social and ecological crises that are so endemic in the age of what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism" (Klein 2007), diligent investigators can always discover the hidden machinations of "the business community." The headlines on Iraq focus on the twists and turns of Washington's game and the gory events on the ground. Behind those terrible stories and off dominant media's radar screen, however, the United States' occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan generate a steady flow of capitalist return to strategically placed corporations like Boeing, Raytheon, Halliburton, Blackwater USA, and General Dynamics. Meanwhile giant western oil companies scheme to extract future super-profits from the petroleum fields of Mesopotamia. They have acted behind the scenes to shape a draft Iraqi Petroleum Law they hope someday will favor such an outcome.

Hurricane Katrina provides another terrible example. When most Americans think of Katrina, their minds flash to shocking images of bloated bodies and scenes of desperation at the New Orleans Convention Center and Superdome. But there was and is a deeper Katrina story hidden from public view. As Greg Palast notes:

"The corpses floating through the Ninth Ward attracted vultures. There was ChoicePoint. They picked up a contract to identify the bodies using their War on Terror DNA database. In the face of tragedy, America's business community pulled together, lobbying hard to remove the 'Davis-

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Bacon' regulation that guarantees emergency workers receive a minimum prevailing wage. Within the week, the Navy penned a half-billion contract for construction work with Halliburton. More would come."

"Our President, as he does in any emergency situation, announced additional tax cuts. He ordered immediate write-offs for new equipment used in rebuilding. That will likely provide a relief for Halliburton, but the deductions were useless to small New Orleans businesses which had no incomes to write off. The oil majors, the trillion dollar babies, won a \$700 million tax break."

"Don't think of hurricanes as horrors," Palast writes, "but as [business] opportunities" (Palast 2007, p. 321).

### **"BECAUSE OF EVERYTHING'S THAT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS"**

A smaller example can be found in Benton Harbor, Michigan, a desperately poor and 92 percent black town directly adjacent to Lake Michigan. Containing 11,000 people and located 100 miles east of Chicago, Benton Harbor is an especially graphic reminder that concentrated racial oppression lives beyond the metropolitan core. The town was designated "the worst place to live in the nation" by Money Magazine in 1989. Even at the end of the long 1990s "Clinton Boom," more than half of Benton Harbor's children and 40 percent of its families lived in official poverty. The city's poverty rate was three and a half times that of the U.S. as a whole. Median family income in Benton Harbor was \$19, 250, just more than two-thirds of the minimum basic family budget (the real cost of being poor, as meticulously calculated by The Economic Policy Institute) for one single parent and two children living there: \$28, 422. According to one Benton Harbor minister, less than one in three adult Benton Harbor males was employed in the spring of 2003 (Koltowitz 1998; U.S. Census 2000; Boushey et al. 2001)..

The concentrated misery in Benton Harbor stands in sharply incongruous contrast to the picturesque lakefront properties, beaches and rustic terrain that surround the town in scenic Berrien County. That 80 percent white county's family poverty rate (9 percent) and median family income (\$47,000) are roughly proximate to those of the nation as a whole (U.S. Census 2000).

The last time that Benton Harbor received national media attention came in the second week of June 2003. That's when it hosted the second significant racial disturbance to occur in the United States since the September 2001 terror attacks supposedly united all Americans in opposition to terrorist enemies (the first occurred in Cincinnati late in the same month as the jetliner attacks, in response to the acquittal of a policeman who killed an unarmed black youth (Walsh 2001). For two nights following the death of a young black motorcyclist, Terrence Shurn, in a police chase, hundreds of Benton Harbor residents roamed an eight-block area, some setting fires and attacking passers-by (Wilgoren 2003, Mastony and Quintilla 2003, Christoff and Hackney 2003, Guerrero 2003; Street 2003). As the New York Times reported in a front page story, "rioters were chanting, 'no justice, no peace,' as they overturned vehicles, tossed small firebombs into houses, and shattered windows with bottles and rocks, injuring 12 people" (Wilgoren 2003). The rioting "was so intense," the Chicago Tribune reported, "that fire trucks and squad cars were peppered by several shotgun blasts, and were pelted with bricks before they retreated. Benton Harbor Township police said they fired several shots into the crowd, but no one was struck" (Mastony and Quintilla 2003).

Within two days, Benton Harbor was under governor-ordered military occupation. A large police force including hundreds of officers from the Michigan State Police and other local jurisdictions stormed the town in full riot gear, with armored vehicles, tactical units, assault rifles, and a helicopter with a sweep light that continually circled the riot zone. According to the Chicago Tribune, the scene "was reminiscent" of the 1960s, "when major cities such as Chicago saw some neighborhoods burn in a wave of urban violence." On Chicago television screens and newspapers, pictures of the confrontation between the forces of order and angry mobs in occupied Benton Harbor were juxtaposed with similar images from occupied Iraq, suggesting dark connections between the war (on poor people) at home and the war (for empire) abroad. Just miles away, the waves of the great inland sea Lake Michigan lapped up onto a beautiful shore. Vacationers there struggled a bit more usual with trying to continue ignoring the tragedies of daily existence in abandoned communities like Benton Harbor.

"There have been these forgotten places of America since the 1960s - towns that are left out because they were created for reasons that no longer exist," Pepperdine University researcher Joel Kotkin told the London Financial Times. "Then something like Benton Harbor happens and people

are suddenly reminded of their existence" (Grant 2003).

### **"Years of Frustration"**

In the simple-minded story provided by Chicago television news, the riot erupted as an immediate, Pavlovian response to Shurn's death. The reality is far more complex. Despite the New York Times' misleading page-one headline – "Fatal Police Chase Ignites a Rampage in Michigan Town" (Wilgoren 2003) – print media accounts suggest that the violence really emerged only after Benton Harbor police moved to disperse a peaceful crowd of candle-holding mourners, gathered for prayer at the site of Shurn's death. As Latonya Doss told the Detroit Free Press, tempers escalated when the police threatened to arrest a group of 50 people holding a prayer vigil. "We weren't loud," says Doss. "We were singing church songs" (Christoff and Hackney 2003).

The Chicago Tribune's main article on the events in Benton Harbor claimed that "the rioting erupted in reaction" to Shurn's death. Deeper in the article, however, the paper noted that that "later Monday, a crowd of mourners gathered at the crash site, which was still being investigated. Additional police cars were summoned to the scene, mostly to disperse the crowds that had gathered with candles. Some prayed at the site and then became angry when authorities told them to go home. That's when the fires began, officials said" (Mastony and Qunitilla 2003). Disperse mourners! By interrupting this peaceful demonstration, police needlessly exacerbated a tense situation, turning candles of prayer into firebombs of rage.

At the same time, nobody familiar with the racially disparate facts of life in and around Benton Harbor was exactly shocked to hear that significant violence had broken out there. As Ashley Black, Shurn's cousin, told the Chicago Sun Times, "this isn't just because of what happened Monday. This is because of everything that has been happening in Benton Harbor for years...you are talking about years of frustration" (Guerrero 2003).

Benton Harbor had been in dire straits for more than a generation. Prior to the Vietnam era, it was a thriving community, host to what Alex Kolotowitz called (in his widely read 1998 book *The Other Side of the River*) "a flurry of manufacturing activity, most of it centered on the automobile – foundries and parts plants primarily" There were enough decent blue-collar jobs in and around Benton Harbor to attract a modest local black working-class, which accounted for a quarter of the town's population in 1960 (Koltowitz 1998)

In the Sixties and Seventies, however, Benton Harbor lost its downtown department stores to a newly constructed mall outside town. Corporate globalization and domestic de-industrialization eliminated many of its foundries and part plants. As one local historian puts it, "in the late 1960s and 1970s, Benton Harbor began to lose its longstanding manufacturing base to cheaper labor states" (Friends of Jean Klock Park 2007a) The city's biracial working class lost its economic lifeblood to capital's quest to boost profit rates by finding more readily exploitable workers and lower taxes in other places.

At the same time, "urban renewal" scattered Benton Harbor's black population, previously concentrated in a low-lying area next to the St. Joseph River. "Whites, uneasy with their new neighbors, fled," notes Koltowitz, "many of them simply skipping over the river to St. Joseph. Institutions followed, including the newspaper, the YMCA, the hospital, even the local FBI offices. Each had its own reason, which at the time made sense, but in the end, after they'd drifted off, like geese going south, the reasons sounded more like excuses" (Koltowitz 1998, p. 31).

It's a familiar story for those who study race, class, and industrial relations in post-WWII America: the burden of corporate disinvestment's negative social consequences falling with racially disparate weight on blacks, who lack the same resources and freedom as whites to move up and out of communities and occupations rendered obsolete by the supposedly benevolent workings of the "free market," sold to us as the solution to all problems social, political, and personal by the architects of American policy and opinion (Massey 1993, Wilson 1987, Wilson 1996, Street 2007).

### **"THE DREAM OF DEVELOPERS AND WHIRLPOOL EXECUTIVES FOR MORE THAN A DECADE": RIOTS AS A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY**

Business decisions contributed significantly to the latent racial and socioeconomic frustrations that exploded in Benton Harbor four summers ago. More than merely creating critical background for the riots, however, key private-sector decision-makers have been busy since seeking to turn the

2003 disturbances into a business and leisure-class opportunity for the privileged white few. Their effort takes special aim at natural and recreational resources that hold special value for many among the town's predominantly black populace. It is spearheaded by the multinational appliance corporation Whirlpool, which maintains its global headquarters in Benton Harbor and is a specially prized asset in the eyes of Michigan state officials starting with Governor Jennifer Granholm – a relevant fact to which we shall return.

### **"A Gift for the Children"**

If there has ever been any significant and distinctive local compensation for the difficulty of black life in racially Benton Harbor, many residents report, it is Jean Klock Park (JKP). In 1917, John Nellis Klock and his wife Carrie purchased and then deeded a pristine 90-acre parcel of Lake Michigan frontage property to the City of Benton Harbor. The terms of the deed require that the property be used exclusively and forever as a public park and bathing beach. The splendid stretch of land was dedicated "For the Children." It was named "Jean Klock Park" in memory of the Klocks' deceased daughter, who died in infancy (Friends of Jean Klock Park 2007). As the local organization "Friends of Jean Klock Park" (FOJKP) notes in a carefully researched history of the unique lakefront park, "it was never intended to be a profit center" (Friends of Jean Klock Park 2007a). The Klocks' intent is remarkably well-known and kept in community memory. Everyone knows the story.

While it is located at some distance from the city's highly segregated black residential area, the park has long been used by black Benton Harborites for family reunions, church picnics, and baptisms (Friends of Jean Klock Park to Governor Granholm 2006). It is considered a special place where residents of the city's hard-pressed neighborhoods – as poor as almost any in the nation – can "get away" and commune with nature. When I visited JKP in late August of 2007, I met and spoke briefly with a 60-year-old African-American gentleman who visited regularly to look across the lake with a pair of binoculars and to close his eyes and "feel the wind and the breeze." Thirty yards away a young black mother listened to her car radio while her two young children frolicked in the sand. A thirty-something black man read the newspaper and gazed across the lake at the barely visible silhouette of Chicago's skyscrapers. As local resident Emma Kinnard recently told Michigan Radio, the park "was a beautiful gift that was given to us....Some things you can see the beauty of what God has created" (Duffy 2007).

JKP also holds precious value for environmentalists and human ecology. The park's boundaries contain a half mile of stellar Lake Michigan shoreline and include three threatened ecological communities: Great Lakes Open Dunes, Great Lakes Marsh, and Interdunal Wetlands. Marshes and wetlands hold special importance because of their vital role in filtering and purifying groundwater, containing erosion and preventing floods. A threatened plant species, rose pink, thrives there, as it did during the Klocks' time.

Another JKP stakeholder is the public sector. Soon after the park was established, the State proposed to the community that JKP be used as a state park, but Benton Harbor, then a very progressive, mostly white community, refused and reiterated the donors' intent and the community commitment to maintaining it as a city park in perpetuity. By the early 1990s, the state and federal government together poured \$1.7 million in grant funds to develop park amenities and conserve the park's natural resources. The public monies invested in JKP have always come with restrictions stipulating "public ownership and use of public lands" (FOJKP 2007, FOJKP 2007a).

### **"A Site for Dogfights and Drug Deals"**

Reflecting the broader pattern of racial separatism that infects Southwest Michigan as well as most of the rest of the U.S., JKP has developed over time into the area's one and only "black beach." Revered as a special recreational, therapeutic and spiritual haven by numerous long-time black residents, it has been demonized by local whites as an "underclass" menace. A recent issue of Midwest Real Estate News summarizes conventional Caucasian wisdom in Benton Township when it refers to JKP as "an underutilized Lake Michigan beachfront gem. The property," this developer organ says, "is fairly isolated and when it developed a reputation as a site for dogfights and drug deals, most of Benton Harbor's residents stayed away." (Brody 2007).

### **Business, City, and Media Machinations**

But one person's place of beauty and serenity is another person's (or corporation's) commercial prospect. And one environmentalist's concern for sound and beautiful ecology is another person's barrier to "development." Given its potential as a profit center for real estate interests and its strategic position between two stretches of favored, upper-end real estate inhabited by Benton Township's and City of St. Joseph's staunchly Republican and heavily white business elite, the all-too black, poor, and public JKP has long been targeted for Caucasian enclosure. A number of key local business players, aided by compliant city managers and elected officials, began planning during the middle and late 1980s to convert a large section of the park into some version of a massive, commercial development, changing through the years to the current plan – three holes of a privately owned golf course that would primarily serve affluent white residents and visitors. The leading agents of this endeavor in recent years include former Whirlpool CEO and onetime corporate globalization guru David Whitwam (see Maruca 1994) current Whirlpool CEO Jeff Fettig and the "Cornerstone Alliance" – an inter-municipal Southwest Michigan chamber of commerce founded by Whirlpool to "generate economic growth and promote civic development" (Cornerstone Alliance 2007).

The Cornerstone Alliance (hereafter "Cornerstone") describes itself as "an investor-driven organization committed to improving the economic wealth of our community" and "supporting the preparation of local business leaders to sustain positive change" (Cornerstone Alliance 2007). As far as local activists affiliated with Friends of Jean Klock Park (FOJKP) are concerned, Cornerstone is "Whirlpool, Junior" and its mission statement has a useful translation: "an investor-driven organization dedicated to creating a veneer of community concern to cloak corporate assault on public property, the environment and non-affluent peoples' right to enjoy nature."

FOJKP was formed in 2003, when Benton Harbor's officials tried to remedy the city's chronic post-industrial budgetary shortfalls by selling a nine-acre parcel of the lakefront to a local group for residential development under the name "Grand Boulevard, Inc." FOJKP filed a lawsuit to stop the deal, leading to a mediated Settlement Agreement and subsequent Consent Decree permitting the city to sell four acres for luxury homes but ordering that the remainder of the park would be protected from "further sales or development for purposes other than park purposes" (Friends of Jean Klock Park 2007a).

During this litigation, FOJKP members worried that Whirlpool and Cornerstone were behind "Grand Boulevard." The activists' suspicions deepened when an activist found an "Edgewater Development Plan" presentation board that had been left behind from a Cornerstone meeting in a local art gallery. Dating from the late 1990s, the planning document laid out a future "Grand Boulevard Development" and ominously marked out a large section of the park for so-called "recreational improvements." The bottom of the board read:

EDGEWATER DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
CITIES OF BENTON HARBOR AND ST, JOSPH  
WHIRLPOOL CORPORATION, CORNERSTONE ALLIANCE

Local concerns with developer plots intensified when "Grand Boulevard, Inc." conversion, approved by the State and the National Park Service, allowed the City to replace the lost parkland with parcels along the nearby Paw Paw River and with abandoned post-industrial fields in the city's unappealing downtown. Some of these nowhere zones were contaminated with lead and off limits to children (Friends of Jean Klock Park 2007b).

Things got weirder still just before Christmas in 2004. That's when the local business-dominated newspaper, The Herald Palladium, ran a front-page story announcing plans for a massive (500 acre) lakefront development called "River Run." The project's leaders were identified as Whirlpool and Cornerstone. Titled "Road Map to the Future?," the article was accompanied by a map that did not include JKP in its boundaries (Herald-Palladium 2004).

Five months later, The Herald-Palladium made the same deletion from a map inserted within a laudatory story titled "River Run Project Aims for Balance." The story included a quote from Whirlpool Vice President Jeff Noel, who claimed that "River Run" planning contained "no preconceived notions as to boundaries" (Swidwa 2005). Shortly after the first Herald-Palladium article, however, local activists learned that Whirlpool and Cornerstone were planning to build part of a golf course on the park. And in the spring of 2005, FOJKP members obtained a "brownfield development" plan including a map displaying two golf course holes on JKP property.

As the word got out about the hidden private threat to the public park, local residents and activists

flooded the paper with letters demanding truthful reporting about the planned assault on citizen property deeded for permanent public use. Activists went to the paper with copies of the "brownfield development" map, but Herald-Palladium dismissed their letters, claiming they were based on nothing more than "rumor" (FOJKP 2007b)

### **The "Power to Attract People"**

Early in July of 2005, however, the paper printed a story titled "Fight for Klock" and showing a map of JKP containing sections of a golf course (Swidwa 2005a). Six days before this belated bow to the principle of journalistic accuracy regarding plans long in the making, the city's bribed and bullied commissioners approved the "River Run" – subsequently re-named "Harbor Shores" – "development" plan (FOJKP 2007b). And last January, city "leaders" signed a final lease agreement with Harbor Shores that abrogated the founding Klock deed (FOJKP 2007) and the Consent Judgment. The contract would essentially enclose three-fourths of the public park's remaining 73 acres so that three holes of a "Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course" can entice affluent clients with sweeping views of Lake Michigan. Leading PGA Republican Jack "Golden Bear" Nicklaus, who recently visited Benton Harbor to see the beautiful park for himself, claimed that it would be impossible to attract golfers to his new Harbor Shores course without the spectacular lake vistas afforded by invasion of the JKP commons. "If you took Pebble Beach's ocean holes away," Nicklaus explained, "it would be just another golf course. The whole idea is to create a mousetrap that the mice are enticed into. To not use the lake or some of that area [JKP that is] you would lose 90 percent of your power to attract people" (Arend 2007).

### **"To Change the Image from an Industrial Kind of City"**

According to Benton Harbor City Manager Dwight Mitchell, the dismemberment and privatization of Jean Klock Park is "the key to changing the city's future. We want," Mitchell recently told Michigan Radio, "to change the image from an industrial kind of city to a tourist kind of location that people want to visit and stop because of the amenities that we have here so that's going to change the whole complexion of the community" (Duffy 2007). Never mind that cutting-edge corporate globalizer Whirlpool – which markets in 140 countries, maintains 13 manufacturing facilities throughout the world (see Martin et al. 2000) and retains only one factory (employing 300) in Benton Harbor (where its large-scale manufacturing operations were concentrated through most of the 20th century) – long ago helped change the town from "an industrial kind of city" to a center of extreme poverty and joblessness. "Complexion" was an interesting word choice on the part of the technically black Mitchell, who is "working with Whirlpool, developers and some non-profits not to promote the park, but to build a resort on and around it. Harbor Shores," Michigan Radio notes, "will be a \$500 million golf course, hotel, marina, and luxury home development....a lakeshore resort just 90 miles from Chicago, perfect for a second home [emphasis added], and with a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course" (Duffy 2007). The design plan is an essentially gated community (FOJKP 2007c), setting up forbidding barriers of race and class to keep the city's disproportionately black and poor residents away from the privileged white visitors and home-buyers that Whirlpool and Cornerstone (whose treasurer is Whitwam's son) wish to bring to the city's charming western shore, which contrasts so poignantly with the vacant lots, boarded-up buildings, and dilapidated first (and only) homes in the downtown and the adjacent hyper-segregated neighborhoods of inner Benton Harbor.

"The golf course," Michigan Radio adds, "has been the dream of Whirlpool Executives and developers for more than decade, but getting all the necessary permits and approvals to build on the park land was difficult" (Duffy 2007). Fittingly enough, former Whirlpool CEO Whitwam (who enjoys a sumptuous mansion close to JKP) is the head of Harbor Shores, which is candidly described as "the pet project of Whirlpool Corp" by Midwest Real Estate News (Brody 2007). Also fittingly enough, Nicklaus is something of a globalizer himself. He is the head of Nicklaus Design, which operates 316 courses in 30 countries as well as 38 U.S. states (Arend 2007).

### **"Put those Gorillas Back in the Woods": Whirlpool's "Pipe Dream" Gets "a Golden Touch From the Golden Bear"**

According to a glowing article that appeared in the South Bend Tribune last August, the park where generations of Benton Harborites have communed with nature and each other "could be sacred ground to area golfers" by "the summer of 2009." By the paper's account (Wozniak 2007):

"Huge pieces of machinery are lined up around Jean Klock Park, ready to move heaven closer to earth with a gem of a golf course in the Harbor Shores development project. Sunday, what was once a pipe dream got a golden touch from a Golden Bear. Golfing legend Jack Nicklaus arrived in Benton Harbor for the first time to tour what will ultimately become one his signature golf course designs. Sitting in front of a weed-strewn field that eventually become the driving range of Southwest Michigan's future golf gem, Nicklaus offered his vision of what golfers can expect: 'This site will absolutely change overnight,' said Nicklaus...Nicklaus, who will be a frequent visitor during the construction period, is planning for the course to play about 7,100 yards from the back tees, but he prefers to keep the blue tees in the 6,300-6,600 yard range for the average golfers. 'These days, you're designing the courses for Tiger Woods or guys that play like him. These kids today hit the ball nine miles,' he said. 'The game is to make sure the average golfer has the ability to play your golf course, enjoy it and have fun. Then you put those gorillas back in the woods and let them hit is as hard as they want.'"

According to South Bend Tribune reporter Steve Wozniak, "a steep ravine leading up to the dunes above the beach at Jean Klock Park will provide golfers with a panoramic view of the Lake Michigan from the No. 7 green" (Wozniak 2007) – an amenity that Nicklaus insisted is necessary for his project to attract players. A call to Nicklaus Design about the "signature" designation revealed no such requirement.

## **CORPORATE JUSTIFICATIONS**

### **"No One Uses the Park"**

Whirlpool and its allies seek to justify this notable act of racialized commons enclosure with four basic arguments. The first rationalization claims that "no one uses the park," as Cornerstone and (just for the JKP heist) City attorney Geoff Fields, told the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board (MNRTFB) while seeking that agency's approval (granted in the October 2006) for the assault on JKP. Fields tried to "prove" this claim by showing the MNRTFB an enlarged photograph of a momentarily empty portion of the park (FOJKP to Granholm 2006).

As a group of residents told Governor Granholm in September of 2006, "this blatant lie is a disgrace. We use Jean Klock Park for recreational activities of all kinds, for church suppers, family reunions, picnics, senior citizen outings, weddings, baptisms, school field trips, festivals, concerts, and of course general public use of the beach. The dunes are an important part of the park, providing a peaceful setting for these activities and an environment for our children to explore nature" (FOJKP to Granholm 2006)

What Fields really meant to say was that "no one who matters in profit-focused white America uses the park." JKP might hold critical cultural, social and ecological use value for the mainly black residents of Benton Harbor and the natural environment we all share. But for Whirlpool and allied regional business interests, it is an idle "brownfield" loaded with untapped exchange and leisure value and excessive blackness – a dysfunctionally "undeveloped" piece of illegitimate commons that needs to be "saved" for profitable use by great white men of capital

### **Mendacious "Mitigation"**

The second justification claims that only 25 percent of the park would actually be enclosed for the golf course, leaving the rest for public use. The problem here is that all the rest of JKP except the sandy beach would be circled by golf holes and therefore unusable.

The third justification is that Harbor Shores would replace parkland taken from JKP with replacement parkland for an "expanded" JPK. The project would donate eight such allotments with a total of 47 acres (Because state and federal money was used to develop the park in the past, the city is required to donate land to the city to replace lost parkland.) One difficulty here is that the "mitigation parcels" are scattered and non-contiguous. Many of them are landlocked within the broader golf course (15 holes of which are beyond JKP's original boundaries) and some of the "mitigation" parkland is located in St. Joseph and consists, the Detroit Free Press reports, "of walkways through the middle of a proposed marina-townhouse development. All but one of the parcels," reporter Tina Lam adds, "are contaminated with heavy metals and chemicals (Lam 2007). Some parcels are already owned by the city, being sold to Harbor Shores only to be donated back to the city in a transparent scam. The residents would lose valuable parkland and get nothing in return. The "mitigation math" behind the process is based on an appraisal that severely

underestimates the value of the park, which is priceless to begin with.

And of course no amount of superficially green "mitigation" can make up for the lost ecological benefits of destroyed marshes and wetlands or for the considerable ecological damage that will be inflicted by the construction and maintenance of a large, heavily fertilized golf course, which can be counted on to pour a large and steady stream of noxious, nitrogen - intensive run-off into local water supplies. In addition, an eighteen-hole "state of the art" golf course can be counted on to require and wastefully use tens of millions of gallons of water each year (see Burke, Luecke, and Young 2003).

The park's proposed "conversion" (theft and privatization) is still under consideration by the National Park Service – the one federal agency that has a major say in the park's fate. "To Benefit the Community"

The fourth and most important justification is that Harbor Shores would provide jobs and development that would alleviate the misery and oppression that gave rise to violence in the spring of 2003. "After riots in 2003 garnered international attention," Midwest Real Estate News reporter Megan Brody claimed last July, "it was obvious to local leaders that the Lake Michigan community was in dire need of change. The town has remained popular as a traditional summer destination, but many year-round residents never repeated the benefits of the seasonal dollars." Harbor Shores and its golf course are "designed," Brody wrote, "to jump start the economy in a struggling Michigan town" (Brody 2007).

Brody deepened her service to Benton Harbor's business-based powers that be by uncritically quoting Harbor Shores chief Whitwam on Whirlpool's supposedly benevolent intentions in the following passage: " 'We're using economic development to change people's lives,' says David Whitwam, trustee and chairman of Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment Inc. [HSCRI], the project's nonprofit developer. The hope is it will bring temporary construction jobs, permanent jobs and an increased tax base to the community...' We've been thinking about this to benefit the community'" (Brody 2007). According to the Herald-Palladium, in an admiring story honoring Nicklaus' visit to Benton Harbor in the summer of 2007, Harbor Shores – whose full success is supposedly contingent on the invasion of JKP – will create 4,000 jobs over five years of construction and 2,000 permanent positions thereafter (Arend 2007).

HSCRI started with a \$12 million loan from Whirlpool. The "nonprofit" has recently received a \$9.2 million tax break from Governor Granholm.

To buttress its curious claim of altruistic concern, Whirlpool has included a number of supposed social service organizations it has largely created in the partnership of groups that "comprise Harbor Shores." These intriguing institutions include a mysterious, Cornerstone-affiliated entity called "The Alliance for World Class Communities (AWCC)," whose vision statement calls for "an inclusive environment where the richness of our differences are viewed as strengths and where all citizens are prepared and contributing to our interdependent, world-class communities." The Benton Harbor-based AWCC includes among its partner organizations a Berrien County outfit called "The Council for World-Class Communities," which describes itself as "a nonprofit community development organization guided by the principles of collaboration and diversity with inclusion." Another ACCW partner is a Cornerstone-linked organization called "The Center for Progressive Change" (CPC). CPC's mission is to implement the vague, pro-"development" and –"inclusion" recommendations of Governor Jennifer M. Granholm's Benton Harbor Task Force, another arm of the Harbor Shores developers, formed in the wake of the riots (all of these groups and their mission statements are linked off Cornerstone's website: [www.cornerstonechamber.com](http://www.cornerstonechamber.com)).

But Whitwam, Brody, and Whirlpool's statements of loving community kindness sparked by the disturbances of 2003 are more than a little disingenuous. Desperately poor and predominantly black Benton Harbor stopped being a "popular summertime destination" many years ago. As one former Benton Harbor resident who prefers to remain anonymous notes, moreover, "we have proof that Whirlpool has been after the park and waterfront since at least 1987." In a section marked "Jean Klock Park" from a 1987 document titled Waterfront Redevelopment Study, City of Benton Harbor, Michigan, Consultants' Final Report, Study completed for City of Benton Harbor and Southwestern Michigan Commission, an "outside expert" hired by the city wrote the following:

"Detailed recommendations for these two sections are difficult to formulate at present since the future of these lands depends to some extent on the nature and extent of the developments undertaken by the Whirlpool Corporation in the adjacent St. Joseph Special Development Area. However, an essential principle of the redevelopment must be that Section 8, the lake front

section, should remain a public park. High priority should be given to developing a master plan for this section which will balance the need to preserve the fragile dune landscapes with the growing demand for beach recreation opportunities and associated vehicle circulation and parking facilities. Section 9, the eastern third of Jean Klock Park and adjacent interchange lands have good potential for a hotel-convention center whether developed by the City of Benton Harbor acting independently or as part of a comprehensive development plan involving the adjacent City of St. Joseph Special Development Area. No similar site exists in the City of St. Joseph so a cooperative plan involving the Whirlpool Corporation and the two cities appears to be a good possibility. A major hotel and convention center with a view of the lakeshore, access to the beach, and a good golf course would be a powerful attraction for tourism and convention business...."

The document is loaded with lots of color maps and massive plans presaging Harbor Shores. It also uses much of the same wording, such as "cornerstone," that emerged in later years.

Any doubts that the development was planned long in advance were ended last May. The pamphlet project publicists gave out to announce Harbor Shores' "official beginning" that month openly admitted that the building of Harbor Shores was a 20 year process.

The Whirlpool-Cornerstone community benevolence narrative deletes the enormous amount of money that leading developers and investors like Evergreen Development Co. (responsible for Harbor Shores' master plan) and Chicago's Related Midwest Co. (in charge of the residential portion) and Nicklaus Design stand to make off Harbor Shores. It also omits Whirlpool's interest in creating upper-end housing capable of attracting cutting-edge global coordinator class professionals to Southwest Michigan, whose recreational charms do not shine so brightly once winter sets in. As Brody acknowledges, "Whirlpool, a company that operates a bus for its employees who would rather make the two-hour jaunt to Chicago each day, has serious concerns about being able to attract the talent required for a operation its size" (Brody 2007).

In part, JKP would be sacrificed to an exurban version of the highly racialized gentrification that is displacing disproportionately black poor people from central city Chicago neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods are being systematically "up-scaled" to house and entertain elite professionals required to handle tasks of legal, organizational and economic coordination that are being concentrated in that increasingly "global metropolis" (Street 2007). Residents being pushed further to the metropolitan margins are supposed to be pleased with the low-wage and generally non-union service jobs generated to meet the living and recreational needs of the predominantly white urban professionals who stand atop the "global city's" increasingly bifurcated, post-industrial labor market.

Whirlpool's assault on Jean Klock Park is partly a curious form of globalization-related gentrification – one that takes place beyond the metropolitan core and targets ecological and recreational resources, not housing.

It is unlikely that Harbor Shores will create many good jobs for which Benton Harbor's large number of poor and black unemployed will be qualified and hired. Local activists report that the project's authorities are already beginning to hedge on promises to set aside a significant number of employment slots for local residents. The remunerative construction jobs involved in building Harbor Shores will go to predominantly white skilled workers in regional building trades; the 2003 riots may have been sparked partly by black anger over whites' monopoly of construction jobs in downtown Benton Harbor, interestingly enough (see Wilgoren 2003a). Conventional local wisdom holds that the prestigious caddy jobs will go "rich white college kids from [the adjacent town of] St. Joseph," not Benton Harbor kids. The jobs that open for lesser-skilled local black residents – waiters and waitresses, cleaners and the like – will pay low wages and lack benefits. They will be particularly inhospitable to the large number of residents – including a remarkable 70 percent of Benton Harbor's black males 17 to 30 years (Wilgoren 2003a) – who carry felony records (industrial work is the type of labor most friendly for ex-offenders). Many of those positions can be expected to go to cheap immigrant (Latino) labor, widely available on Michigan's western shore thanks to the presence there of large fruit and vegetable farming operations.

Harbor Shores will offer little relevant substitute for the livable wage employment that Whirlpool and other manufacturers removed from Benton Harbor in the last third of the 20th century. Carefully guarded design plans at first depicted a commercial district that purportedly would provide Benton Harbor residents with locations for small businesses. A later version, revealed after city leaders approved the leasing of the park, now shows only gated-community residential areas – what one local activist calls "a classic bait and switch." It is sadly ironic, then, that many Benton Harbor residents have been "afraid of speaking out" against the loss of their park "in fear

of not obtaining the jobs that the Harbor Shores project can provide."

### **Jobs Pitted Against Nature for "An Elite Golfers' Paradise"**

But then, as local activists and residents told Granholm in September 2006, "people of color should not be forced to choose between the environment and jobs. We deserve both." As Dave Dempsey, a onetime environmental adviser to Michigan Governor James Blanchard, wrote to Granholm in September 2006, "the citizens of Benton Harbor should not be dealt an ultimatum that forces them to give up precious assets such as Lake Michigan parkland, dunes, and recreational opportunities in order to get jobs" (Dempsey to Granholm 2006)

The "transformation of Jean Klock Park into primarily a golf course, available largely to the privileged, is," Dempsey adds, "is an injustice to the people of Benton Harbor. The use of the park for a golf course changes the park to one used primarily by residents for their activities to an elite golfers' paradise [emphasis added]. The two uses are incompatible" (Dempsey to Granholm 2006). Never mind, of course, that that are already many dozens of golf courses available within a thirty mile radius of Benton Harbor. Or that just nine percent of the U.S. population plays golf, according to the National Golf Foundation (Burke, Luecke, and Young 2003). It is of course well known that the relatively small segment of the population that plays this expensive game comes disproportionately from the affluent classes.

### **THE STATE AND MEDIA IN WHIRLPOOL'S BACK POCKET**

#### **"It's a Local Matter"**

For her part, the state's corporate-Democratic Governor has refused to meet with Benton Harbor residents or to acknowledge their concerns about the privatizing golf occupation of JKP. Her office has told residents that the plan to dismember and essentially enclose their park – in direct violation of the park's original deed and the recent court judgment to protect JKP – is a "local matter" in which she can not be involved (Edwards to FOJKP Member 2006). . Ironically enough, however, Granholm has lent considerable state-level support to Whirlpool-Cornerstone's Harbor Shores project. In a May 2006 memo to Whirlpool CEO Jeff Fettig, Granholm congratulated Whirlpool for its acquisition of the Maytag Corporation (leading to elimination of hundreds of jobs in Newton, Iowa) and then promised to help Whirlpool's "pet project" (Brody 2007) with state dollars and permit approvals. Granholm also pledged to help Harbor Shores obtain financial and technical assistance from the federal government (Granholm to Fettig 2006).

For Michigan's governor, apparently the local designs of regional real estate developers affiliated with powerful multinational corporations deserve state and even federal backing. But the local place-, justice-, and ecology-based concerns of a desperately poor black town's residents and their environmentalist allies do not deserve a fair hearing or assistance from the higher authorities as far as Granholm is concerned.

#### **"To Keep Whirlpool in Michigan"**

Granholm's refusal to side with Benton Harbor activists and their environmentalist allies stands in curious contrast with her previous advocacy for the preservation of Michigan's Arcadia Dunes in Benzie County. In that earlier struggle, Granholm supported efforts to "keep" – in her own words – "one of the most the most scenic and picturesque places in Michigan open for the public to enjoy for generations to come" (as quoted in FOJKP to Granholm 2006)

The keys to explaining these seeming contradictions are the extreme poverty, isolation and related powerlessness of Benton Harbor's black residents and the structurally super-empowered position of Whirlpool within Michigan. Relatively middle-class and white communities like 96 percent white Benzie County, Michigan possess the political capital required to procure state support in successfully resisting development plans for their public lakefront parks. Deeply poor, black and demoralized Benton Harbor does not.

And of course it doesn't hurt the ecologically destructive project's chances that the corporate behemoth Whirlpool is the real force behind Harbor Shores. Whirlpool executives have made sure to shower Granholm with tens of thousands of dollars of campaign contributions over recent years. Equally if note more significant, Whirlpool's supposedly benevolent decision to maintain its

headquarters and a few thousand (chiefly managerial and clerical) jobs in Michigan is something that Granholm finds politically useful in supporting her claim to be advancing "job creation" in her state. Detroit Free Press reporter Tina Lam summarizes the quid pro quo that has emerged between Granholm and Whirlpool to doom JKP: "Harbor Shores is a carrot Gov. Jennifer Granholm used to keep Whirlpool and its jobs in Michigan, a victory she pointed to often during last fall's re-election campaign" (Lam 2007).

Harbor Shores epitomizes a critical form of business control that supplements campaign funding, lobbying, and corporate media monopoly to ensure that policymakers do the bidding of private power: the threat to relocate investment capital and its attendant "economic development" benefits – "jobs" above all – out of a jurisdiction that does not give the investor class what it wants. According to one knowledgeable local activist and native Benton Harborite, speaking on condition of anonymity:

"The reason they [Whirlpool] maintain their corporate headquarters in Michigan is because they have the government in their back pocket – their very own family [Republican] Congressmen, Fred Upton [a lineal descendant of Whirlpool's founders, P.S.] – and no one will say 'Boo!' to them about anything. Further, the executives all live in beautiful (mostly) lakefront houses, which would be difficult to replace somewhere else. The other [U.S.] places where they have manufacturing facilities, and other operations – Clyde, Ohio, La Vergne Tennessee, Tulsa – are not exactly Paris, either. They do have their annual shareholders' meeting at the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago, though."

#### **A Media-Encouraged Sentiment: "Why Stick Out Your Neck?"**

By one local informant's account, "this place is no different from the rest of America. People feel that their vote, their voice mean NOTHING, that the fat cats will win in the end no matter what they do, so why waste time? Why risk their ire? Why stick out your neck?" It doesn't help, the informant adds, "that we have no media support whatsoever."

Regarding that critical problem, here is an interesting story from last summer from local activist Carol Drake:

"Recently, Jack Nicklaus came to tour the golf project and finalize design plans. He would not meet with the public. Prior to his visit, on August 10th, I and others discovered a 75-100 foot long linear pile of neatly laid out trash – 13 toilets, tires, furniture, etc., in an area adjacent to the park. I knew this trash had been dumped and was staged for Jack's visit. TV news broadcasts were highlighting the trashy areas of the proposed golf course and reporting that a golf course was the only solution to stop the dumping and clean up contaminated land [emphasis added]."

#### **"We Knew if we Moved or Said a Word we Would be Arrested"**

It isn't just the local media that Whirlpool has in its back pocket. By Drake's chilling account, which merits lengthy quotation, it also owns the local police – the people who so locally famous for prematurely ending the lives of young black males from inner Benton Harbor:

"On the 10th, I met with a fellow member at the park. Upon leaving, a Benton Harbor police officer drove into the intersection with lights flashing. Then came a four-wheeler with more Benton Harbor officers. I knew that Jack was on his way. I went back to warn the other member. Two Benton harbor police officers and two members of the Cornerstone Alliance approached us. One officer said, 'Ms. Drake, you aren't here to cause problems for Jack are you? You aren't going to yell and scream are you?' I told him I had no intention of doing so, but did not appreciate being harassed. I was told that they were there for 'my protection.'"

"An entourage of 30-40 people soon appeared along with Jack who totally ignored us. We were surrounded by the 2 police officers and Cornerstone people and knew if we moved or said a word we would be arrested. When Jack's entourage left so did our police and Cornerstone bodyguards. When I left the park the entourage was gawking at the pile of trash near the [projected] ninth hole. I told an officer that the pile of trash was staged for Jack's visit. His reply was 'it's been there longer than a couple days and I know that for a fact.' It was clear that he was taking orders from Harbor Shores. A day later, the witness to the dumping went to the police headquarters to file a report. They refused his report, saying 'workers were hired to pick up trash in the park and put it out there so a front-end loader could pick it up at another time.'"

### **"People Were Able to Gather and Have a Great Sense of Community and Enjoyment"**

Residents' and activists' sense that local law enforcement takes its orders from Whirlpool deepened in early September. That's when police in cars and on horses blocked public access to the park while Whirlpool used JKP as the site for the corporation's annual employee picnic.

Jeff Noel, vice president of communications and public affairs for Whirlpool, said "the company puts on a major event once a year to thank employees and the community for making Whirlpool what it is. We certainly didn't want to cause any hardship for anyone. We thought this was a good thing," Noel said. "We had people together laughing, having a good time, and this is what we believe the park is intended to be."

"We had people from all over the region, including Benton Harbor, who said they'd never been to Jean Klock Park before," Noel added. "They said what a wonderful use of the park this was, and I feel good about that. People were able to gather and have a great sense of community and enjoyment. It was great."

Noel said the company chose Jean Klock Park for the annual gathering of Whirlpool employees and their families because they thought "it would be a good chance for people who had never been there to enjoy the park."

Local residents who were prevented from visiting the park had a different perspective. One of those left out of "good time" was Carol Drake, who reminded local authorities that "the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service have made it clear to the city of Benton Harbor that the park must remain open to the public at all times." Drake told a local reporter that "she is afraid that in the future Whirlpool will block access to the park on many occasions" (Swidwa 2007).

### **"No Student Left Inside"**

Ten months after her memo to Whirlpool, Governor Granholm declared March 20th 2007 "No Student Left Inside Day." "One of the great gifts we can give our children," the governor proclaimed, "is to make sure they connect with the amazing natural resources we have in Michigan. Whether we take them fishing, hunting, hiking, mountain-biking or simply let them discover the beauty of nature, helping our children connect with the outdoors is essential to making sure our natural resources are protected and respected for the future" (Niles Daily Star 2007)

In the case of JKP, however, "Governor Granholm believes it's acceptable to take from children natural resources that were deeded and dedicated to them to build a golf course for an elite few. How," FOJKP asks, "does this teach children to respect and protect their natural resources?"

"In addition," the activist group says, "the Governor is proposing to cut school funding if there is no tax increase. The schools are strapped as it is and those with no surplus cannot finance bus trips for 'No Student Left Inside' day. In the meantime, she has poured millions of state dollars into the Harbor Shores project" (FOJKP 2007d).

### **A DEVIL'S CHOICE AND A FALSE DICHOTOMY**

Like most of the rest of the nation's best natural and recreational resources, the Indiana and Michigan dunes are a predominantly white preserve. People of color and poor black people especially rarely enjoy the sort of proximity to such cherished geography as been afforded by rare historical chance to black Benton Harborites. Now even that is slated for elimination as "the world's leading appliance manufacturer" claims that its special love for "community," "diversity," and poverty alleviation – a curious declaration claims in the historical wake of its crippling industrial near-abandonment of Benton Harbor – compels it invade and enclose Jean Klock Park and turn into a rich Republican white man's "golf paradise" that would function as a formidable barrier between the poor black town and the great blue inland sea. The intense poverty of Benton Harbor – a legacy of decades and indeed centuries of combined and cumulative race and class oppression

within and beyond the town – provides an ironic and cruel pretext for Whirlpool to realize longstanding and aristocratic sporting and real estate “dreams” at the expense of the city’s lower and working class.

It’s one of many painful local episodes in a larger historical drama. No longer capable of combining private-accumulationist wealth acquisition with the development of U.S. productive capacities, post-industrial capital increasingly goes back to the capital system’s ugly genesis by increasing its reliance on “accumulation by dispossession” (David Harvey) of social and environmental resources (Harvey 2007, pp. 137-182)

In the process it tries to force a vicious either-or choice on those sitting on the wrong side of the nation’s great and interrelated divides of race, class, and place: “jobs” (any jobs) or ecology. “I care about jobs,” one black Benton Harbor City Commissioner has said, “if you want to go to the beach, go to [the adjacent and 95 percent white town of] St. Joseph.”

But for Benton Harbor’s poor black residents, this is a devil’s choice and something of a false dichotomy. The assault on their beachfront emanates from the same perverse profit-focused and private-accumulationist logic that has stripped their community of remunerative employment and community stability. With the help of some allied environmentalists, the more courageous of them assert their simultaneous rights to environmental and economic justice against the authoritarian logic of an at once white-supremacist and business-dominated political economy that drowns the common good, livable ecology, and popular use value in the icy waters of egotistical calculation, exchange value, and the opulent narcissism of the privileged and globally connected few.

Paul Street's latest book is *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis: A Living Black Chicago History* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007). Paul can be reached at [paulstreet99@yahoo.com](mailto:paulstreet99@yahoo.com)

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